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TWO DOLLARS

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RV BUSINESS

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Existing Truck Campers Don't Fit New GM Trucks

Some truck-camper manufacturers are expressing concern about the industry impact of the restyling of the rear box of General Motors Corp.'s Chevrolet and GMC 1988-model full-size pickups. Due to the GMC redesign, the truck box will not accommodate some previous truck-camper designs.

"The problem that we have as camper manufacturers is that GMC narrowed the space between the wheel wells," explained Bill Doyle, president of Western Recreational Vehicles in Yakima, Wash. "We use that space to put in toilets and shower stalls, which now won't fit the narrower opening."

Robert Rieth, manager of special vehicles for the GMC Chevrolet Division, confirmed that the 1988 truck boxes are about 2 inches narrower in the front and 3 inches narrower in the tailgate than in the 1987 models. Specifically, Rieth said that the 1987 boxes were 65.75 inches wide both in front and rear, while the 1988 models are 63.75 inches wide on the inside front and 62.2 inches wide on the inside rear.

The new truck design forces some retooling costs on camper manufacturers. Doyle noted that the change in the 1988 models required a redesign of his company's 10-foot, 9-foot and 8.5-foot units, for example. Western's 11-foot units were not affected by the GMC restyling, Doyle noted, although other manufacturers' 11-foot units may require design changes.

Doyle also contended that the change will have an adverse impact on RV owners and consumers. Stressing that typical truck-camper owners buy new trucks more frequently than they trade or upgrade their campers, Doyle said, "The worst thing is that all those people who buy new Chevrolet and GMC trucks don't know that their old camper won't fit. When somebody pays $15,000 for a truck and finds that the camper doesn't fit, he may get rid of it and not replace it. He may get mad at the RV lifestyle." Many consumers

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Minor Supply Shortages Cited

Strong 1987 RV sales are creating minor supply shortages and are forcing RV manufacturers to swallow some supply-price increases. But, contrary to recent rumors, a survey of manufacturers found no reports of significant supply shortages so far.

Several RV makers did predict that strong demand for supplies would mean price hikes in some areas.

Jay Hill, purchasing agent for Coons Manufacturing Inc. in Oswego, Kan., foresaw a 3-cent- to 5-cent-a-pound increase in the price of fiberglass resin. "I don't know how long I can get my current supplier to hold the

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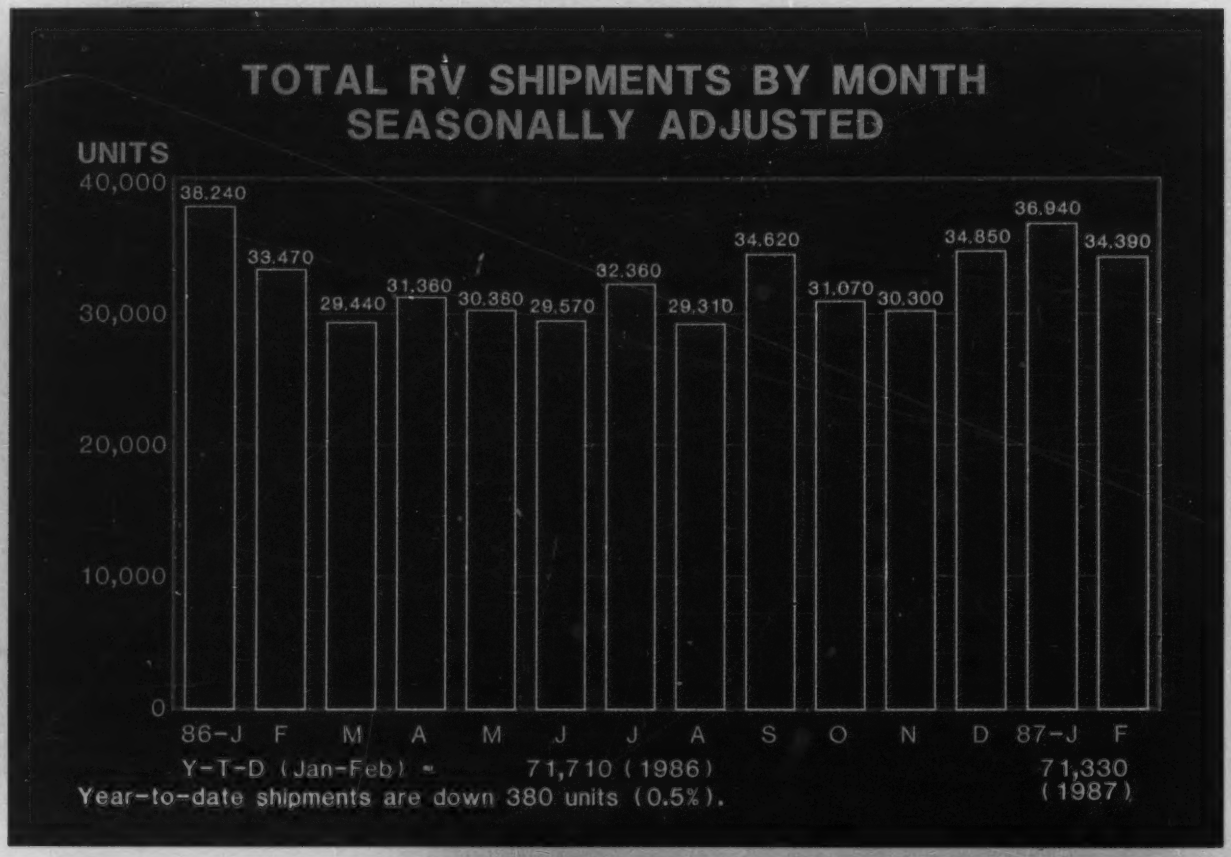
FEBRUARY OFFERS SOME ENCOURAGING SIGNS

MORTON J. MARCUS



For the first two months of 1987, one might as well be using the old 1986 calendar. The earliest RV shipment numbers in from RVIA, after adjustment for normal seasonal patterns, seem to suggest it would be a mistake to believe that a new year had begun. The RV industry seems to be trapped in a rerun of last year, as if the industry were an old TV series and life nothing more than late-night entertainment. At least, that's the surface impression.

Total shipments for 1986 and 1987 to date (January and February combined), as shown in Figure 1, were just about as even as these numbers can be. This year was a miniscule .5% below last year, at 71,330 units compared to 71,710. That was a difference of 380 units, which could be little more than statistical noise.

But, there were signs in the data that

RV SHIPMENTS BY TYPE OF UNIT
(Adjusted for seasonal variation)

TYPE:	FEB 1986	PERCENT CHANGE FROM JAN.	YEAR-TO-DATE 1987	YEAR-TO-DATE 1986	PERCENT CHANGE
TOTAL RVs	[illegible]	-6.9	71,330	71,710	-.5
Travel Trailers:					
Conventional	5,510	-10.9	11,780	10,270	14.0
Park Models	695	-8.6	1,190	1,270	-6.0
Fifth-Wheels	2,150	-2.1	3,480	4,320	-19.4
Folding Camping Trailers	3,100	-14.3	6,270	6,080	+3.5
Truck Campers	1,250	-27.1	2,210	1,980	+16.0
Motorhomes:					
Conventional Class A	2,410	-4.7	4,580	5,230	-12.4
Van Campers Class B	1,000	-23.0	1,810	1,960	-7.6
Class C					
-Mini	3,100	-20.5	6,020	6,060	-.6
-Low Profile	540	-1.5	980	870	+15.6
-Micro-Mini	420	-6.9	870	530	+58.7
Multi-use, Van Conversions	1,630	-26.0	13,740	15,040	-8.7

Data may not add to total due to seasonal adjustment.

GRAPHICS: CUSTOM COLOR VISUALS

DAB PERSPECTIVE

	NEW UNITS						USED UNITS					
	FOR MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE			FOR MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE		
	FEB. 1987	FEB. 1986	% CHANGE	1987	1986	% CHANGE	FEB. 1987	FEB. 1986	% CHANGE	1987	1986	% CHANGE
MOTORHOMES	74	71	+ 4	120	142	− 15	76	106	− 28	139	150	− 7
TRAVEL TRAILERS	79	68	+ 16	125	123	+ 2	77	45	+ 71	115	90	+ 28
TRUCK CAMPERS	12	13	− 8	33	27	+ 22	8	4	+100	12	7	+ 71
CAMPING TRAILERS	78	113	− 31	166	188	− 12	29	18	+ 61	33	24	+ 38
FIFTH-WHEELS	10	14	− 40	18	18	0	7	5	+ 40	13	6	+116

	FOR MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE		
	FEB. 1987	FEB. 1986	% CHANGE	1987	1986	% CHANGE
SALES VOLUME	$6,786,185	$6,858,192	− 1	$11,831,725	$11,736,914	+ .8
TOTAL UNIT SALES	460	457	+ 1	774	775	− .1
NEW-UNIT SALES	253	279	− 9	462	498	− 7
USED-UNIT SALES	207	178	+16	312	277	+13

FEBRUARY '87 PARALLELS FEBRUARY '86

GAYLORD MAXWELL

February was a "mixed bag" for RV dealers, according to the Dealer Advisory Board (DAB). About half of the members had better sales this year than last, but half had worse.

Overall, the sales volume and number of units sold for February 1987 were almost identical to February 1986. Two RV types were up in new-unit sales (motorhomes and travel trailers), and three were down. Comparing 1986 and 1987 year-to-date, sales figures—in both dollars and units—were less than a percentage point apart.

The impact of used-RV sales was very obvious. Although the total used-unit sales figure for the year-to-date was only a little over half of the sales for new, one should note that in big units, new and used totals were not far apart.

Profit ratings for used-unit sales ranged from excellent to fair, with more than half of the ratings excellent or good.

Motorhomes

After a setback in January, new motorhome sales seem to be back on track. Although not impressive, there was a slight sales gain this February over the previous year. Year-to-date, new-unit sales were still down slightly compared to 1986.

Used units, for some unexplained reason, took an awful drop in February—down 28%. Some of the large motorhome specialists were particularly hard hit, but, with only a couple of exceptions, all DAB members with strong used-unit departments felt the slump. Year-to-date, the figures for 1987 and 1986 weren't as far apart. With what has generally been a strong market, there's no reason to believe that February's performance was a trendsetter.

Profits on new motorhome sales were relatively weak in February, with most DAB members rating them as only fair and a few rating them as good.

Travel Trailers

After a slow start in January, sales of this type picked up nicely in February.

Used-trailer sales were even stronger. The 71% increase for the month was the best seen in a long time. New-trailer profits were rated to be either good or fair by most DAB members.

Truck Campers

Although the new-sales figure for the month was down slightly, year-to-date numbers indicated that, in both new and used units, this type is headed for a good year.

Profits were rated as excellent by the largest DAB camper dealer.

Camping Trailers

The sharp February drop in new-unit sales reported by the DAB doesn't mean that the bottom has fallen out of the market for folding camping trailers. Actually, the drop reflects a very successful promotion of heavily discounted units last year and no sales in '87 by one of our DAB members.

Used fold-down sales appear to be picking up. Profits were rated a bit on the weak side—which will probably be a problem for this RV type all year.

Fifth-wheels

After an excellent January, fivers took a dive in February. Fortunately, that dive was large only in percentages, and the unit drop was one that can be brought up again quickly. Year-to-date figures for the DAB were the same for new units, and used sales were quite strong. Profits were generally rated to be good. Δ

The "DAB Perspective" is a compilation of data provided by *RV Business'* Dealer Advisory Board (DAB), a group comprised of 19 dealers representing a cross-section of the U.S. dealer body.

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This report is an attempt to reflect the current retail sales picture; it does not purport to indicate RV production or factory sales to dealers.